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# CANCER FACTS

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National Cancer Institute • National Institutes of Health  
Department of Health and Human Services

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## Quitting Tobacco: Handling Stress ... Without Smoking

### What To Expect

- After you quit smoking, handling the normal stresses in your life may become more of a challenge.
- Quitting smoking itself is stressful and adds to your stress load.

### Did You Know?

- Most smokers report that one reason they smoke is to handle stress.
- You may become more aware of stress during withdrawal. This happens because smoking cigarettes actually relieves some of your stress by releasing powerful chemicals in your brain.
- As you go longer without smoking, you will get better at handling stress, especially if you learn relaxation techniques.

### Nicotine and Your Body and Mind

- Everyday worries, responsibilities, and hassles can all contribute to stress.
- It is thought that once nicotine enters your brain, it stimulates production of a number of the brain's most powerful chemical messengers.
- These chemicals (epinephrine, norepinephrine, dopamine, arginine, vasopressin, beta-endorphin, and acetylcholine) are involved in alertness, pain reduction, learning, memory, pleasure, and the reduction of both anxiety and pain.
- When you smoke, your brain chemistry changes temporarily so that you experience decreased anxiety, enhanced pleasure, and alert relaxation. This is why it feels good when you smoke.

### What To Do

- Know the causes of stress in your life (your job, your children, money).
- Identify the stress signals (headaches, nervousness, or trouble sleeping).
- Create peaceful times in your everyday schedule. (For example, set aside an hour where you can get away from other people and your usual environment.)
- Try new relaxation methods and stick with the best one for you.



- Rehearse and visualize your relaxation plan. Put your plan into action. Change your plan as needed.
- Seek and learn relaxation techniques such as progressive relaxation.

### **Related Notes**

- You may find it helpful to visit your library or bookstore to pick up a book about how to handle stress.

### **How To Get Help**

- If you or someone you know wants help with giving up tobacco, please call the National Cancer Institute's Smoking Quitline toll-free at 1-877-44U-QUIT (1-877-448-7848). The information specialists on the Quitline can provide suggestions and support to help smokers break the habit.
- The Federal Government's Smokefree.gov Web site (<http://www.smokefree.gov>) allows you to choose the help that best fits your needs. You can get immediate assistance:
  - View an online step-by-step cessation guide.
  - Find state quitline telephone numbers.
  - Instant message an expert through NCI's *LiveHelp* service.
  - Download, print, or order publications about quitting smoking.

<p>This fact sheet was adapted from material developed by the Tobacco Education and Prevention Program of the Arizona Department of Health Services and the Arizona Smokers' Helpline of the University of Arizona.</p>
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